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ABSTRACT

A study examined the link between on-the-job training (OJT) and job performance in a randomly selected sample of 50 skilled maintenance craftpersons employed by the city of Chicago. The sample was identified from the training sheets signed by 160 employees who participated in OJT in a 1-month period. The majority of the employees agreed with current trends and ideas found in research concerning OJT. Employees overwhelmingly agreed that the subject matter of their OJT program was logically organized and that the instructor presented the subject matter well, was organized and prepared, stressed safety rules, and related the subject matter of the OJT to the employees' work. When asked about written materials and training facilities, 92% of the employees responded positively. The employees agreed that the OJT made them better able to do the following: assist an injured employee, use fire extinguishing equipment, understand a train operator's viewpoint, and recognize various safety zones and warnings. The employees' overwhelmingly positive responses about the content and relevance of their OJT was concluded to be evidence in support of the hypothesis that employees receiving OJT experience increased job satisfaction, work knowledge, responsibility, and productivity. (The employee questionnaire is included.) Contains 13 references. (MN)

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DOES ON-THE-JOB TRAINING IMPROVE AN EMPLOYEES' JOB PERFORMANCE?

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Traditionally, workers and their employer's have been comfortable with classroom training, and have resisted computer-based training, outdoor field training, or training of any sort that is "different." A training department's responsibility is to find ways to deliver appropriate training effectively, and at the right time, in order to give employees more skills, raise productivity and create profitable products.

The training profession was born in the United States in the early 1900's with the idea that employees might benefit from skills training. It was believed that managers had the innate characteristics of industriousness, intelligence and leadership which did not need to be developed through training. The industrial revolution of the 1800's demanded a training response for all employees, including managers. In 1912 the National Association for the Promotion of Industrial Education was founded with the intent of advancing workplace skills training, and the American Society for Training and Development was founded in 1945. (Technical & Skills Training, 1994).

The speed of changes in the workplace today, makes it important for companies to periodically require workers to attend "on-the-job training" classes. Training offers an employee hands-on experience in simulated situations found on the job, realistic examples of how new skills translate into on-the-job performance, and encourages workers to apply skills learned when returning to the actual job.

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There is growing evidence that a fraction of the cost of training could be prevented by focusing on upgrading and reviewing

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a seasoned employees' present skills, which is more cost effective when compared against the costs involved in training. It is also important that employers measure whether employees learned something, rather than with how many employees they trained.

According to Stephen Cohen, (Training & Development, 1991), "More than 27 million Americans, or 20 percent of adults, are functionally illiterate; sixty percent of U.S. high school seniors can not read; approximately 500,000 high-school graduates cannot read their diplomas; one of every four high school graduates cannot locate Canada on a map, and one of every five sixth graders cannot locate the United States on a map". The American Management Association's (AMA) 1994 Survey on Basic Skills Testing and Training, (Technical & Skills Training, 1994) reports that of nearly 800 AMA member companies surveyed, only 1.9 percent of the companies hire and train skill-deficient job applicants. This means that there will be too few trained and educated workers to satisfy America's economic workplace needs in a diverse workplace.

If an employer needs "proof" to spend training dollars, it needs to be proven that training can return considerable savings in time and money to an organization. The training costs for new employees versus legal expenses for justifying dismissing poorly trained employees, could be offered as a "proof". The higher costs in lost productivity and lower quality due to ill-prepared employees, is a "proof" and lost revenues and profits due to poor performance is also a "proof". (Training & Development, 1991). Managers of the future will need to be even more skilled than they are today. They will be required to provide continuous on-the-job training in order to integrate relatively unskilled workers into the workforce.

In conclusion, the history of on-the-job employee training teaches us that technological changes require changes in workplace performance and expertise, and that employers and employees are

equally responsible for the successes or failures of on-the-job training programs.

Procedures

This study included a random sample of 50 skilled maintenance craftpersons employed by the City of Chicago. The company had approximately 3,200 maintenance employees. Females constitute 2% of the department, black men 12%, white men 78%, Hispanics 6%. Every three years, on-the-job refresher safety training is mandated. The sample was identified from the September attendance sheets signed by the employees who participated in the training. The employee attendance sheets were numbered one through 160. A computer software program was used to generate random names for sending the questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaire were then tabulated, the percentages of "yes", "no", "satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses were analyzed and the Chi Square was used to determine the statistical significance (.05) of the responses.

Findings

The data in the following table summarize the statistical analyses regarding the responses from the questionnaire and show that the majority of the employees agree with the current trends and ideas found in research concerning on-the-job employee training. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. In the section concerning subject matter taught, employees overwhelmingly agreed with all six questions. They agreed the subject matter was logically organized, and that there was sufficient time to include an overview, demonstration questions and hands- on practice.

Five questions dealt with the way the instructor presented the

material. The employees agreed the instructor presented the subject matter well, was organized, prepared, stressed safety rules, and related the subject matter to their work. When asked about written materials and the facilities, 92% of the employees responded positively. This expresses a general feeling among the employees that on-the-job refresher training is beneficial. The final section of the questionnaire was concerned with the value of the training received. The employees agreed they felt better qualified to assist an injured employee, use fire extinguisher equipment, understand a train operator's point of view, recognize a Slow Zone, and recognize a Worker's Ahead system.

TABLE 1

RESPONSES TO SAFETY CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

A. YES B. NO C. SATISFACTORY D. UNSATISFACTORY

A	B	C	D		
38	0	0	0	1.)	Subject matter was logically organized
38	0	0	0	2.)	There was time to include an overview
38	0	0	0	3.)	There was time for a demonstration
38	0	0	0	4.)	There was time for questions
38	0	0	0	5.)	There was time for practice
0	0	38	0	6.)	The instructor presented subject well
0	0	38	0	7.)	The instructor appeared to be prepared
0	0	38	0	8.)	The subject related to my work
0	0	38	0	9.)	Instructor coached during practice
0	0	38	0	10.)	The instructor stressed safety rules
38	0	0	0	11.)	Written materials were clear & readable
37	1	0	0	12.)	Materials supported the ideas presented
38	0	0	0	13.)	I received necessary materials
38	0	0	0	14.)	I will now recognize Slow Zones
38	0	0	0	15.)	I can recognize Worker's Ahead zones
37	1	0	0	16.)	I can assist an injured employee

38	0	0	0	17.) I can use fire extinguisher equipment
37	1	0	0	18.) I understand the operator's viewpoint

In response to the comments section of the questionnaire, many employees made comments that further indicated their agreement with what is found in current research. The following are those comments:

1. Refresher training reminds everyone how dangerous it is out on the railroad.

2. If on-the-job refresher training saves one person's life, it is well worth it.

3. I feel that knowing what to do when someone has fallen on the third rail, is one of the most important benefits. This should be gone over thoroughly so that there is little hesitation in the possibility of saving a life.

4. The importance of awareness of hazards on the railroad track is the most important benefit derived from the safety refresher training classes.

5. It's good for the employees to know about Slow Zones.

6. A safety refresher should be offered every two to three years due to the added benefit of not taking safety for granted.

7. On-the-job refresher training reminds you of the danger of working on railroad tracks.

8. Some people take safety for granted, and this training wakes them up.

9. I have a much better understanding of track safety after taking this class.

10. I feel the time between refresher training should be shorter.

Analysis of the employees' responses indicate they felt positive about the content and relevancy of the training. The findings of this study also agrees with previous research done on

the costs of training. In summary, the findings indicated that: Employees receiving on-the-job training experience an increase in job satisfaction, work knowledge, responsibility, and productivity.

Further research is needed to evaluate upper-level managers assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the training received by their employees.

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